

From the Journal of Dr Wycoff

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From the Journal of Dr Wycoff

The first time I met Benny Russel, I had very clear instructions. He had been writing his crazy stories on the walls of his room. I was to take paint into the room, and convince him back to reality, and get him to paint over the words and give them up. They were quite sure once he did this, it would be safe to release him.

I didn't question them at the time. I never questioned anyone higher in rank than myself back then. In a way, I was just as delusional as I assumed him to be.

I did my job as well as I could. Though he protested that "Sisko needed to open the Orb" he actually looked like he was going to paint them over. Then he decked me and went back to writing.

I'd never seen anyone write anything half as fast. By the time I was back on my feet, he'd finished five paragraphs, ignoring the paint, which had spilled around his ankles. When he saw I was up he looked at me and said, "You're always like that, Damar. Always doing whatever Weyoun tells you. Why don't you just snap his neck, huh? Put him in a transporter accident, and mess his clone up. And stop working for the Pah-wraiths."

Understandably, at the time, when I had no idea what he was talking about, I had every reason to believe my superiors were right and that he was delusion. But I asked the nurse in charge of him about what he said, if only because that was only being responsible. Her name was Elizabeth Dawn. She explained that the story Benny wrote included characters based on actual people, and more often than not he confused the real people and characters. Her character was apparently an alien female called Ezri Dax.

I was told I was to stay with Benny and convince him to give it up. My superiors wouldn't take "I couldn't" for an answer. So for a while

I felt my career was spiraling. I soon gave up trying to stop Benny; after that initial meeting, I couldn't get him to react again to anything else I tried. I had to spend an hour each day with him, and eventually it was settled by unspoken agreement that I would sit in the corner and he would just go on writing. The boredom started to get to me.

Then, about two months after we met, Benny told me and Elizabeth he was writing a movie, with "Worf"'s old crewmates. And I wondered how much harm it would cause if I read it. So I thought that maybe I could read a paragraph or two, just to pass the time. That it might even help give me insight into his head.

I read the contents of the entire wall that day. And when he wrote more, I read that too. By the time I he had finished writing the movie, I was reading everything he had written. I told Elizabeth, and she, too, decided to take a little look. She too got hooked.

Now when he wrote, I read. I even smuggled him paper, so he wouldn't have to write on the walls anymore. The first time I did that, he asked me if I thought he was right. I didn't have an answer for him then. When I told him that, he replied. "You have treachery, Damar. You need faith. Treachery, Faith, and the Great River." And he began writing again, in which "Weyoun" was killed(but recloned). To this day, I still think Benny meant for the readers to think that Damar killed him.

Months more went by, and I pondered his question little at first, then more often, until I became desperate to find an answer. I was further aggravated when he stopped writing, saying he had to think for awhile before writing "the big finale."

When he started writing again, I reached an answer. He was right. We were wrong for imprisoning him. And I told him that.

I don't think it's any coincidence that Damar, who had previously been playing puppet for Weyoun, then rebelled.

During the final weeks Benny was writing, both Elizabeth and I lost most of other concerns in favor of devouring the pages the minute he finished writing them. The day he put the pencil down and announced he was done, we nearly came to blows over who got to read first. We finally squeezed ours against each other to read together.

I must admit, I was dissapointed by the ending. Somehow I'd expect something bigger. Okay, casting off the cliff was good, but destroying a book and saving the universe-it just didn't seem right. I feared Benny was starting to internalize the world's opinion of him.

After he was done, he sank into a depression. He wrote another set of stories taking place in the same universe. At first they were good, and both Elizabeth and I found ourselves absorbed in the adventures of the starship Voyager in the Delta Quadrant. But then they degenerated until we both begged him to stop.

Finally one day I walked in to find the walls painted over. That was shocking, because he actually still was taking notes on them; it kept my superiors from knowing about the paper, and let him save that precious resource for the stories themselves. I just stared, unable

to believe it.

"I never really thought you were literally Damar," he said to me, speaking in a low, empty voice I had never heard from him before. "Though there were times I wished you were, very badly. I mean, I knew all the time where I was; I was never delusional. There were a couple of times before my breakdown where I thought I might be hallucinating, but there I don't even know. But I hated it...but they would've destroyed me if I'd stayed out there. They couldn't destroy my story, but they could keep anyone from reading it. If they'd put me in a straightjacket, maybe I would've acted sane to get out of here. But when noone was reading either way, and I couldn't bring myself to face Cassie...well, it didn't seem to matter much." He stated he would never write again.

For the first time I checked out his history. I should've done it earlier, but I think I'd been afraid of what I would find. It looked like he was no more than just a guy who'd had a nervous breakdown in public after offending the wrong people.

I told my superiors about half of what he'd said, what I thought would get him judged sane, because I thought he'd be better off out in the world, trying to find something else to live for. They congratulated me, hinted I would get a promotion, and released Benny.

Then I shared it all with Elizabeth, and we agreed were disgusted with the society that had labelled Benny mad because his writings didn't quite conform. We talked over the significance of the captain being black. I knew it was the big reason he'd been rejected, I mean, he'd never said so, but that was pretty obvious. I had seen it mentioned once or twice, but only after I was too absorbed to care. I admit, I would have cared if I had noticed immediately, but I hadn't. I count my blessings for that piece of luck.

The day we both resigned, because we could no longer be part of such a system, I proposed to Elizabeth, and she accepted. We told Benny before he left. He laughed out, "Damar and Ezri?" then wished us luck and left. We never saw him again.

Over ten years later, we got a letter from Cassie Russel, whom he had faced in the end, and then married. He had been killed during a civil rights demonstration, and his will left his stories to our keeping. We accepted them, and we keep them carefully preserved, waiting for the day when they can be published, and thrive in a world where the public knows as well as we do that there is nothing wrong with them.

End
file.